

Utricularia menziessii: An Amazing Plant

P. Temple (20 Buzzard Rd., Luton Beds, LU40 OVW, England)

Utricularias are not everybody's favourite plants. They are still relatively uncommon in collections, probably because they are most undemonstrative plants except when in flower. As *U. menziessii* is also a relatively expensive species it is not surprising that few people seem to have grown it yet. But it is possibly the most rewarding of all.

This Australian species lies dormant for much of the year as a tuber. At this stage the tuber resembles a pea-sized hairy coconut, the upper end being a narrow, hairy extension.

When in growth the tuber rapidly produces a web-like network through the soil, and above the surface one finds a bunch of the very tiny leaves, barely 4 mm long at the most. The flowering scape is very narrow and about 6 to 8 cm. long. Supported by this slender stem is an almost grotesque-

ly large flower which is certainly more beautiful than any description I have read. It could well rival other flowers such as orchids; it is a riot of colour varying from all shades of yellow through orange to red.

I am not a believer in waiting for plants to grow. In nature conditions often retard or hasten growth, so why shouldn't I? In April the tuber was placed with its growing tip 3 cm below the surface of a sphagnum peat/sand mixture (equal parts). At this stage there was no sign of growth which is normally indicated by the development of small white hair-like structures from the growing point. I then placed the pot in rainwater such that the entire tuber would be submerged and maintained a temperature of 75-80° F. In June the first leaf suddenly erupted from the soil and this was rapidly followed by the rest of what ended up as an unusually large bunch.



U. menziessii

Photo by P. Temple

I allowed 14 to 16 hours of artificial light (a single "Grolux" tube) held 35 cm above the soil. In July a first flower stem began to emerge from within the leaf cluster followed two weeks later by another. These each took about a month to reach their full height. The buds took a full week to burst open after the first glimpse of petal colouration could be seen. The flowers lasted 5 to 6 weeks and pollination proved to be fairly straightforward, especially as the flowers are quite robust. It took a further 5 to 6 weeks for the seed to ripen after the flower had fallen. The unpollinated flower remained on the other scape even despite my attempts to remove it.

All this information is a guide based on the performance of just one plant. I do not know of any other reported flowering of this species in cultivation but feel our Australian colleagues must be familiar with this. If anyone else has managed I would be interested to hear or read of any differences between their experiences and this one. In particular I would like to hear of germination methods for the seed which I have yet to try. In the event that this proves easy I

see no reason why *U. menziesii* should not become one of the most popular of all carnivorous plants.



U. menziesii



U. menziesii

Photos by P. Temple